

## BEYOND THE SPIRITS OF AN IRON HEART

S02 E05 - "Paradise Lost"

**NOTE: PLEASE DO NOT READ IF YOU HAVE NOT YET COMPLETED IRON LEAGUER, INCLUDING ITS OVA. SPOILERS AHEAD.**

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It was the third day that Silver Castle's automatic cooker had broken down.

"It's done," Ruri, in her apron, finished putting her dinner on the table, and propped her head up with her hands.

"Ruri, I don't think it's fair to say that now..." Edmond took a seat in the dining room and stared at the chili beans on the plate in front of him. This is what Ruri always did when she made a meal.

"Why don't we make something different once in a while?"

Chili beans are green beans or soybeans cooked in a chili sauce. It's so good that it's cooked with sausage and served hot with lots of chili. But it's also clear that any dish that lasts for three meals in three days requires a great deal of commitment or a special palate.

"Oh, I used chorizo for the sausage today."

"That wasn't my point, Ruri."

When Ruri, who hadn't bothered to complain, was disappointed, Ricardo appeared unexpectedly and said, "Eddie, beans are good for you."

"Ricardo," Edmond replied, betrayed. Edmond sighed. Eccentricities came with genius, but he had always been unable to keep up with his brother's taste buds.

"Where have you been? Your food is getting cold."

"I'm sorry, I was called away on an important matter."

"What is it?" Ruri asked as she held out a plate with a generous serving of chili.

"UN has offered to partner with us."

"UN? The company?"

"That's a major leaguer company, right?" Edmond stopped working on his food as Ricardo poured a glass of red wine.

"The UN Corporation will take care of the technical expenses. Well, they're sort of a sponsor. They want to try out new technologies at Silver Castle and get feedback on their

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products. They're thinking of sending a dedicated team to each competition in the future. I don't know, I'm thinking of taking this up."

Both Ruri and Edmond were puzzled by the sudden talk.

"Wait a minute, you can't just say that out of the blue..."

"There is no development if we continue with the system as it is. We've got a great group of leaguers here and we can't take advantage of their abilities. That's not really Ruri's intention either, is it?"

"That's true but... you mean we're all going to end up in disarray at some point?"

"At one time I thought of making a team of each myself. But now I feel I was wrong. If one person is missing, it's not Silver Castle."

"This is good for the team."

It's a Ricardo trait. Quiet, but with or without a mysterious power. Ruri silently lowered her eyes, but she quickly regained her smile.

"Okay, your father wouldn't be on board with a bad story..."

"Well, we can move on then."

Edmond gave her a worried look, but Ruri didn't say anything as she brought the chili to her mouth. She was choking on his breath and her face turned red with exhalation.

"Hot! I put too much pepper in!"

When Edmond saw this, he immediately put his spoon down, but Ricardo continued to eat without a care in the world.

The start of the new season was finally approaching. In preparation for the new season of battle, the defending champion, Magnum Ace, was beginning to heat up in practice.

"Alright, guys! Let's take a break!" Ruri called out as she finished preparing the oil drink.

"Oh, lucky you!" Surrounded by a group of leaguers who had gathered with Top Joy at the head of the group, Ruri looked at each one of them fondly.

"What's the matter, owner?" Magnum noticed her gaze.

"What? No, it's nothing. I was just remembering what it was like before Magnum and the others arrived." Ruri looked up at the world championship flag fluttering over the pole.

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"Everything is like a dream. I wish this time would last forever..."

"Of course, it's better to win! But once you've won, you don't know what to expect next time," Windy says innocently.

"I know..." Ruri let out a sigh.

For some reason, Juurouta felt as if he understood Ruri's melancholy and involuntarily opened his mouth. "A new season will start from nothing again, and continuing to fight for the crown is the way of life for Iron Leaguers, isn't it?"

"Oh, it's hard to see what Juurouta is saying. I don't really understand it." Top Joy shrugged. Juurouta closed his eyes in shame at his own uncharacteristic talkativeness.

Ruri could see how thoughtful he was. "Well, thank you, Juurouta. You're right, it can't stay the same as today forever."

"Owner, what's going on?" Magnum Ace's intuition was sharp as ever. Ruri chuckled and confided in him about the partnership with UN. They were all surprised to hear about what they long feared.

"We're going to lose Silver Castle?" Ryuuken looked uneasy.

"No way. The Silver Castle will always be our Silver Castle."

Just then Ricardo appeared in the doorway to the field. "Ruri, come with me."

"Where are you going?"

"UN Company. I need you to attend the signing ceremony."

"Ah... I see..."

"It's a formality. I need the owner's signature on the text."

All eyes were focused on Ruri. Ruri, who had become uncomfortable staying, replied that she would go right away and took a few steps back. "Let's be champions again this season!" Ruri ran off, but a stagnation remained in all of them that couldn't be dispelled.

"We're doing just fine as it is, we're doing just fine." Windy muttered, looking unconvinced.

"We have no right to interfere with human society..." Juurouta was staring into the void.

"But—"

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"Whatever it is, as long as we have Silver Castle, I guess it's still our fight."

It was a stirring moment in the atmosphere. "No matter, I'll keep fighting alongside you in Silver Castle. It's the least I can do."

GZ agreed, seeming to speak to himself.

Magnum's command broke the heavy air. "Come on, let's resume practice. We're going to raise that championship flag here again!"

The UN company was like a huge golden fortress rising along the seafront. When they were ushered into the reception room, a tall man and a young woman in white were waiting for them. "Welcome Miss Ruri Ginjo. I am the head of our project, Dai Million." The man who condescendingly shook her hand hid a sharp look behind his glasses.

"I'm Sheena Mount, Chief Engineer of the Regal Development Department," the woman in the white coat said. It was a handshake that abolished emotions, like a person in a technical field. The unadorned gesture made her stand out from the crowd, a beautiful woman, Ruri thought.

The signed text was written in a difficult way, and it was chintzy to Ruri.

"Your father knows the contents, he said the signing was just a formality." Trusting Ricardo, Ruri stopped reading and signed off. It was impossible for Ruri to know that the gears of fate involving Silver Castle began to grind to a halt.

A few days later, Dai Million came to Silver Castle in the form of a loan from UN Trade. He informed them of his intention to run the Leaguers in the latest and greatest environment and inspected each facility. And each time he was harsh in his assessment.

In the charging room he said the beds were too old-fashioned, in the maintenance room he called Meckel inefficient for fixing things without using the auto system, and the practice field was 'just another field.'

"All new equipment. We're going to have to make sure we live up to our World Champion name."

Ruri was outraged by Dai's arrogant and high-handed attitude.

The decisive anomaly occurred on the practice field the next day. As usual, Magnum and his team were practicing their formation while Ricardo and Ruri looked on. The centering ball that went up to Juurouta was snatched away by a shadow that flew in from the air. It landed on the field with the ball in its possession. It was an Iron Leaguer who had never been seen before.

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The entire group was stunned and stopped moving as an unfamiliar leaguer jumped over the fence and broke in, scoring a goal in the blink of an eye.

"Okay, rude. Who the hell are you?!" At Juurouta's question, Garret, a leaguer from the sky, smiled wryly.

"A member of Silver Castle."

"What the hell is going on?"

They were all aghast. "What? What the hell was that?"

Ruri was stunned. A voice rang out behind her.

"You are dumbfounded. How could you become a world champion with this?"

"M-Ms. Sheena?!" Ruri was surprised by the owner of the voice. Before she knew it, a plainclothes Sheena had appeared on the field, along with Dai.

"As I've just shown you, the difference in power is clear. We're going to put Garret and his friends in the game from here on out."

"What is going on?"

Ruri and Magnum and the others were shocked.

"Wait a minute, what right do you have to..." Sheena gave Ruri a dubious look as she ate it up.

"It's only natural for the owner to set the tone for the team."

"What?!" Ruri couldn't believe her ears.

"What did you just say?!" Sheena said disgustedly. "The text of the agreement clearly states that we're going to switch owners. Did you not *read it*?"

"Oh... oh no..."

Ruri was at a loss for words and looked at Ricardo. If that was the case, her father couldn't have known. But Ricardo remained silent. Ruri's emotions began to spiral out of control.

"Absolutely not! I own Silver Castle!"

"The signing station has already been accepted by the Iron League Administration. This is official," Dai said mockingly.

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"It doesn't matter! Silver Castle is our—" Ruri, who was still shouting, was interrupted by Ricardo.

"I understand. Now that we've signed it, let's follow the decision..."

"Dad!"

"Come on, Ruri." Ricardo left the practice field with a rampaging Ruri in his arms.

There was an air of confrontation among the remaining Leaguers.

"You've got to be kidding me, I'm not going to give my position to a guy who doesn't know where the hell he is!" The intuitive Windy let out a huff of frustration that he couldn't hide.

Under provocation, the two leaguers, Killer Q and Killer B, who had been identified as of the same lineage, laughed.

"Say hello! We're the latest models from UN. Right, big brother?"

"Datawise, we are far superior to you all."

"What the hell is this..."

"Don't, Windy." Magnum soothed his friend, who was standing on edge. He looked far more indignant than anyone else.

"Alright, that's enough." Edmond put an end to the cacophony with a dignified statement. "That's it for today's practice. Everyone go home and get some rest. This is a supervisory order!" The Leaguers were forced to put the contradiction to rest, leaving the coiled fires smoldering.

"Why? Why is that?" Even on the way to the headquarters building, Ruri packed up, but Ricardo walked ahead without any explanation.

"Is this what's best for Silver Castle?"

Her father's gait didn't change. Ruri almost felt something akin to hatred for her father, who didn't say anything. She couldn't help but cry.

"Dad, I can't believe you..." His daughter had no choice but to flee the scene. Ruri ran into the bedroom and sobbed into the bed.

"This can't be... Silver Castle belongs to all of us."

Ricardo appeared in the room, as the door was left open and walked over to Ruri's bed as she sobbed. "Ruri..."

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"I don't want to hear it! What are you even talking about?!"

Ruri refused to turn toward him.

"Well..." Ricardo slowly turned on his heel. "Well, you have been given many things by Magnum and Windy and the others until today. Nothing can be replaced by anything else. Now it's your turn to do something for them."

The sound of Ricardo's footsteps in the distance echoed in Ruri's chest along with the words left behind.

"Owner! Is this your order?" Early in the next day's work, Sheena was exposed to Dai's true colors.

"What on earth is your problem?"

"Look at this!"

Dai pointed to the monitor in the owner's room. It showed Magnum and the other original Silver Castle members and the new leaguers with Garret, confronting each other on the practice field.

"This is... who would do this?" Ruri's voice came behind Sheena, shocking her. "Sheena..." From Ruri, who was looking straight at Sheena, emanated an unmistakable determination in her heart.

"Let's have a match, to find out who the true members of Silver Castle are."

Deep down, a great storm churned and roared inside of Silver Castle.

To be continued...